

Ruston Daily Leader  
Wednesday, January 18, 2012  
Laying the Foundation  
<http://rustonleader.com/?q=node/20752>



Kyle Falting, freshman math teacher, uses LTF Training to teach math concepts to his students.

## New teaching methods help improve RHS scores

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The School Performance Scores for Ruston High School have been on a steady upward climb in the past few years, and school officials believe that a program called Laying the Foundation is at least part of the reason.

Laying the Foundation, a division of the National Math and Science Initiative, is a teaching method that shows teachers how to teach skills instead of lessons. Julie Stephenson, 2011 State High School Teacher of the Year and English teacher at RHS, explained changes the training made in her own classroom.

“(Before LTF Training) I focused on teaching works,” Stephenson said. “I focused on the stories I wanted to teach or the poems I wanted to teach or the novels I wanted to teach. And, that became the primary goal, to teach ‘To Kill a Mockingbird,’ or to teach ‘Of Mice of Men.’ So, what happened was my students would know very well how to read that story, or they would know a lot about those stories or poems in particular. But, in terms of being able to transfer skills across a number of works and a variety of subjects, that wasn’t happening. So, what we had was this disconnect between what students were doing in my classrooms and what I thought they would be able to do on the state tests.”

After receiving LTF Training, Stephenson said she learned that the works should be used as tools to teach skills students would need.

“What LTF did for me is it challenged me to think about using the works as a medium through which to teach skills,” Stephenson said. “My students when we finished reading ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ knew how to read a novel in general. They knew how to analyze setting in general, they knew how to trace character development in general.”

Stephenson said the program is useful in regular classes, as well as honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes.

“It reinforced a lot of deeply held beliefs about student ability,” Stephenson said. “People have strong feelings about AP and Pre-AP, and are predisposed to think that is only for an elite group of children that have the perfect educational experience. What LTF does is it teaches teachers to teach to that level of rigor, but to break it down so that a wide variety of students can study at that level. While they may not all be A students at the Pre-AP level, they are learning how to do work at a higher level. As a result, they’re more confident about their ability and they are more willing to assert themselves in the classroom in terms of a class discussion.”

RHS Principal Mike Milstead said Stephenson was the one who told him about the Laying the Foundation training. “I had been looking for a way to increase rigor in our honors classes,” Milstead said.

Certain teachers at RHS have been trained in LTF courses since 2009, and now those teachers are set to train teachers district-wide in the skills.

While the transition wasn’t entirely smooth, Milstead said students have risen to the challenge.

“They have adjusted so wonderfully,” Milstead said. “This has been very valuable, not just in honors classes but in college prep as well. I believe when you increase the rigor, you increase student performance. We might have fewer kids with 4.0 (GPAs), but they have higher ACT scores.”

Since LTF was implemented at RHS, Milstead said graduation rates have increased from around 70 percent to more than 90 percent. Additionally, SPS scores climbed from around 90 to almost 120. The number of students taking AP classes and tests has increased by 60 percent, and Milstead said approximately 75 percent of students who took AP tests during the 2010-11 school year received a passing score of 3 out of 5 or higher.

Stephenson said she believes the program has the ability to revolutionize teaching in Lincoln Parish.

“My belief is that Laying the Foundation based courses and AP rigor for everyone has the ability to transform the district,” Stephenson said. “Laying the Foundation has the ability to change the way we perceive academic rigor.”

Emily Howell, 2012 Louisiana High School Teacher of the Year, agreed that LTF has made a big difference in her classroom.

“Laying the Foundation is why I’m a successful teacher, I believe that,” Howell said. “Laying the Foundation has completely changed my career as a teacher.”

But, it’s not only local officials who have noticed the successful implementation of the program at RHS. In fact, the national LTF program named RHS a demonstration site and the school is

featured in a video on the organization's website, which can be found at [www.ltftraining.org/LearnMore/ResearchResults.aspx](http://www.ltftraining.org/LearnMore/ResearchResults.aspx).



Emily Howell, RHS English teacher and 2012 Louisiana High School Teacher of the Year, uses LTF Training to teach students concepts using the novel "Great Expectations."